

LATE PENALTY MISS ROCKS WANDERERS

FOOTBALL has a way of levelling itself up over a season as Wycombe Wanderers found out to their cost on Saturday.

Only seven days ago, Barking missed a late penalty to leave Wycombe 2-1 winners. On Saturday, the Blues were awarded an 87th minute penalty which would have made the score 1-1 at Leatherhead. Spot kick specialist Tony Horseman stepped up to take it, but uncharacteristically scooped the ball over the top and so Wanderers left Fetcham Grove with nothing to show for their efforts.

A hard, uneven ground made this Rothmans Isthmian League encounter a scrappy affair but on the day, few could claim Wycombe deserved to go down. They worked hard, none harder than Terry Reardon, mounted a good deal of pressure on the home side and yet were unable to create enough chances to count.

This rather undeserved defeat sees Wycombe lose their place as league leaders after only a week in the number one spot. Ilford now occupy that place by a single point, while Dulwich go second after beating Dagenham 2-1.

Fetcham Grove has never

been a happy hunting ground for Wycombe — they haven't won there in the last three seasons — but the players knew only too well afterwards that they should never have lost this one. Territorially, they had much more of the game but they failed to seriously test experienced goalkeeper John Swannell. The former England international dealt comfortably with any shots that came his way but was rarely stretched to the full. The same could be said of John Maskell, who was seldom troubled.

There were some contrasting performances from the Wycombe players. John Delaney, who has recently taken over the captaincy again from Keith Mead, was a tower of strength at the back and completely unbeatable in the air. Horseman, however, struggled to get into the game while Howard Kennedy faded badly near the end.

Bruce Macrae, continuing at centre forward, gave more evidence of his improvement but found home centre half Dave Reid at his very best. Overall, however, the Blues made too many errors and, for once, were unable to carve out enough clear cut

chances.

At the start, things looked promising for Wanderers as Geoff Anthony, back in the side, began to find space on the right flank, sending over some dangerous early crosses. Reardon netted with a 10th minute header but referee Cullen had blown for a foul on Swannell. Forcing four corners in the first 12 minutes, Wycombe looked set to break through at any time, but Leatherhead were quick to pull back all their front runners to assist the defence.

Swannell pulled off his best save after 21 minutes. A clever flick by Anthony created a chance for Macrae who drove in a shot on target. The keeper had to dive sharply to his left to take the ball.

Thanks to Reardon's tremendous work rate, Wycombe maintained a steady hold in midfield while Leatherhead were frequently penalised by the referee for over enthusiastic challenges. Macrae was usually the one to suffer.

Leatherhead's best hope seemed to spread from their F.A. Cup hero Chris Kelly. An extremely talented player, he gave several Wycombe players the runaround but as always, tended to hold onto the ball too long. Even so, it was a pleasure to watch a player with such ability in confined space.

If Wanderers had the better of

the first half, they dominated the second and kept the home side pinned in their own half for long periods. Ray Eaton did a good job on containing Kelly, although the Leatherhead striker had a good chance in the 49th minute. Keith Mead headed a cross straight to him but Kelly's shot lacked power and Maskell saved easily.

Half chances followed at each end with Horseman heading Macrae's clever overhead kick just wide and Peter Page netting in the 57th minute. This effort was ruled out for a foul on Maskell. A long range drive from Macrae, on his favourite left foot, had Swannell stretching after 62 minutes.

Dylan Evans replaced Anthony in the 70th minute but was unable to make an impact. Too often, Wycombe tried to make sure of setting up a shooting chance for a colleague instead of taking responsibility themselves.

Still, Leatherhead had done nothing to worry Maskell for 20 minutes of the second half while the home defence had to weather increasing Wycombe pressure at the other end. Two or three scrambles in the goalmouth might have gone Wanderers' way but it was not to be and after 82 minutes, Leatherhead broke away to snatch a shock lead.

Referee Cullen awarded a free kick for pushing against Kennedy and Willie Smith floated the ball to the far post. Maskell stayed on his line, Mead

tried to clear but the ball hit John Bailey and finally it was Mick Holifield who miscued into his own net in a bid to get the ball away.

Wycombe must have been sickened with the goal after having so much of the second half but with only three minutes left, it seemed justice was to be done after all. From their eighth corner of the game (Leatherhead had two), Horseman sent the ball deep into the six yard box. If Swannell has one weakness it is his insistence on punching the ball at set pieces. He tried it again this time but blatantly pushed Macrae in the back before doing so. Right on the spot, the referee brushed aside Leatherhead's heated protests and awarded the penalty. But before the kick could be taken, two players, one of them Swannell, moved the ball from the penalty spot in a bid to unsettle Horseman. Mr Cullen took no action but it may well have affected Horseman who got underneath the ball and sent it over the crossbar.

There was precious little time left for Wanderers to attempt to get back again and they must have been bitterly disappointed to surrender all three points at the final whistle.

LEATHERHEAD: J. Swannell; D. Sargent, D. Wells, D. Reid, P. Page; J. Bailey, S. Ibbotson, W. Smith; C. Wofinden, C. Kelly, J. Doyle, Sub M. Swain (not used).

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, D. Delaney, R. Eaton; H. Kennedy, T. Reardon, M. Holifield; A. Horseman, B. Macrae, G. Anthony (sub D. Evans 70 mins).

Half time: 0-0. **Goalscorer** — Holifield o.g. (82).

Referee: D. Cullen (Herts).

By STUART EARP Leatherhead 1, Wycombe Wanderers 0